

MONTANA FUR HARVESTERS



APRIL 2024
SPRING issue

**MINK OF WESTERN
MONTANA**

WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS

Working with FWP

Brain Tanning Pelts

President's Message
Educational Events

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Montana Fur Harvesters

2024 Spring Magazine

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Cover Photo, High lighting our Montana Mink



FWP biologists,
Tyler, and Molly
Parks, collaring a
wolf, see page
12 for more on
this.

*Photo by A
Moments Reflection
by Carrie Franklin*



Notes from the president.

March 2024 News.

I am sitting at the computer looking back on January, thinking about my wolf lines. It was a different winter, I guess I say that almost every year. The previous winter was all deep snow and early compared to this one, which had very little snow or cold temps. Being able to drive a pickup up to most of our traps sure made it easy compared to running snowmobiles. Our season was cut short by two months and hurt our harvest. Even with the short season overall, the harvest statewide exceeded the previous two. More on this on page 13.

The weather this spring has been as nice as could be. Beautiful blue skies with brilliant white Mountain tops. Looking out the windows from my office doing all the paperwork doesn't do justice to myself by not being out to take advantage of it. As I was eating dinner with my family the other evening, I looked out at the glowing mountain tops and announced how blessed I was to be able to share this time with all here in Montana.

The **FWP/Trapper Spring meetings** are coming up so get all your ideas thought out and bring them. Again, this is where we work with the biologists to review last year's data and plan for next year's quotas and give them what we experienced in the field.

News on **Trapper Education**. A meeting was held in Helena in January with the Education Committee to discuss some issues that had come up. We are still in need of additional instructors for Eastern Montana so sign up! An Instructor workshop for Trappers is scheduled for April 20th at the Region Two office starting at 9am.

Interesting story about **wolves vs wolverines**. Here some groups are trying to get wolverines listed in Montana while doing the same for the wolves. Is there a conflict. See page 9.

On March 27 and 28th I was in Browning for meetings with **the Montana Beaver Working Group**. This was the second year that I have taken part in it. I am looking forward to this and think that it is good to stay up to date on the direction this is going. I was hoping that Bob Sheppard would be able to attend as well. It is good to give our trapper's perspective.

Torrey Ritter from FWP is working with the group and plans on attending our FWP/Trapper's meetings in Region 1&2 this spring. He will give a better report on the subject.

It has been busy as heck the last couple of months. Our organization supports both wolf reimbursement groups. The **Foundation 4 Wildlife Management and the Rockin WK** here in Northwestern Montana both held their banquets in February. It takes a lot of planning and prep work to put on these events. Thanks to all that come out to volunteer to put on these events. Both of these banquets saw record results with very happy attendees. It was inspiring witnessing the community support of these sportsmen groups.

The annual **Montana Sportsmen Expo** held in Kalispell at the end of February was a big success. George and Dennis Johnson of the Party Store in Kalispell do a wonderful job of putting on this major event for Western Montana. They thought that it was a big success, and it certainly was for us. We had somewhere over a thousand visitors to our booth over the 3 days.

Well, we made it through another week. FWP held the **Spring Instructor Workshop** in Kalispell. Had a good turnout from our member instructors that got an update on some new stuff. Everyone got to meet our new Outdoors skills and safety supervisor, Francis Reishus, working from Helana. Francis introduced himself with a positive attitude and some new ideas on the future of our education programs. Francis has been great to work with and we are looking forward to the future.

Our next event put on by the Montana Fur Harvesters and the Montana Trappers Association was our annual **Fur Handling Clinic**. Shawn, Amber and Kimberly Meuli's of Columbia Falls have always hosted an awesome event for the public. The clinic is free to all. This has always been a popular event for families and guests. Between Shawn and Mort, they also put on a great meal. Josh and Tristan Jurek were hosting their clinic that same day so between us we pretty much covered all of Western Montana. Thanks Josh and Tristan for all you do for us.

This is a good time of the year to contact all of the **landowners** who have allowed us to access their properties. One of the owners called the other day. He had just returned to where we had set up some bait stations and thought that the wolves must have killed a lot of elk. He saw lots of leg bones but no skulls. It took me a few minutes to figure out what he was seeing. Then it came to me, it was leg bones from our bait piles that were laying around after the snow melted. I apologized and reminded him that I had called at the end of the season when we pulled the traps. I let him know then that the snow was probably

hiding some of the bones and that we would come back after the snow melted. Then he remembered

May 4th Sanders County F4WM Chapter Banquet,
Trout Creek, MT. Doors open at 3pm, dinner 5pm



May 18th Libby
Chapter F4WM Banquet
Memorial Events Center,
Doors open at 3pm- dinner
at 5pm

Watch your emails for up-
and-coming events that I
will be sending out. We
will be putting on Trapper
Certification Classes, Fur
handling clinics and
Advanced Skills programs
this spring and summer
that need to be scheduled.

Contact information for
The **Foundation 4 Wildlife**

and was relieved to learn that the wolves hadn't killed the elk he was hoping to protect. I said that we were planning on coming over in a couple of weeks if the snow had all melted, but he said that it would be better to wait a little longer because the ground was still really soft and was leaving ruts.

Wolf management on **private lands in**

Montana is vitally important. We as sportsmen need to do everything we can to foster good relations with landowners.

Grizzly bear recovery in Montana has reached a level that needs addressing. We are seeing what people are doing to twist reality around facts to restrict outdoor uses. Taking lawsuits to sympathetic Judges to get rulings in favor of their views, despite science will cost dearly. Now we are faced with the wolverine listing.

Calendar of Events

See the **calendar of events** that we will be facing soon. If you ever start getting bored, I am sure you will find something that you could take part in.

April 12th-14th The Kalispell Gun Show at the
Majestic Arena

April 13th Montana Trappers Association Annual
Banquet in Livingston

April 20th MTSFW Pig Roast Fundraiser, Missoula
County Fairgrounds, Commercial Building

Management

Flathead Valley Chapter January 27th Banquet

Co-Chair Russell Swindall 406-253-1108
russellswindall@icloud.com

Co-Chair Scott Smith 406-249-9951 [d](#)

Sanders County Chapter May 4th Banquet
Co-Chair Glenn Schenavar 406-531-3655
glennmontana@gmail.com

Co-Chair Nate Kane 406-334-7135
elkoholic234@gmail.com

Bitterroot Chapter March 23 Banquet
Co-Chair Jeff Rennaker 406-360-0304
jirennaker@yahoo.com
Co-Chair Chris Fillingham 406-531-8236
chrisfillinghamfs@gmail.com
Chapter Secretary Kathy Richardson 406-369-1417
rcattleco2014@gmail.com

Lincoln County Chapter May 18th Banquet
Co-Chair Levi Carlberg 406-334-1787
lcarlberg73@gmail.com
Co-Chair James Call 406-293-1033
xo6915@gmail.com+

Rockin WK **Tim Viano 406-249-0203**

Eureka Banquet April 6th Orvando Banquet TBD

Thanks for your support, hope to see you there!

Tom Fieber 🐾



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Greetings ITA members, Greetings from muddy Idaho,

It has been unseasonably warm here in Fairfield and it feels more like March with snow melting and mud on the county roads. I have a lot to cover so will dive right into this.

Our January fur sale was a success even though fur volume was down. I felt like fox (all species), beaver, heavy badger, otter, squirrel, marten, skunk, and skull prices were up from last year. We had a tremendous number of craft items and they really have helped pick up some of the slack on low coyote prices. Leaving feet on pelts can add \$5-\$75 to a pelt for the wall hanger market. All types of raw skulls, claws, baculum, cleaned bones, dried skins of pheasant/grouse/quail/chukar/turkey, turtle shells, and raw feet sold well. Beaver, otter, badger, wolf and cougar skinned out carcasses have value frozen and brought to the sale. The antler market is down some, but prices were competitive for antlers, mounts and taxidermy items. If it's

hunting, trapping, wildlife related and legal in Idaho, we will allow you to put it on the sale. We need as much volume as possible, as this is our biggest fundraiser of the year. We cannot be as successful of an organization without your support on these fur sales! See the averages below, I pulled out another 50 categories just to save space.

The next sale is March 8-10 and it's going to be even bigger than the January sale. IDFG wolf trapper education class, skinning demos, trapping demos, skinning competitions, food vendors, general membership meetings, IDFG meetings, live auction with donations, and a live band on Saturday night. Even if you don't have fur and parts to sell you don't want to miss this event! Beaver and otter prices are still hot hot hot so trap them right up until the sale. The Skunk and badger market is hot and make sure you leave the feet on the badger pelts. Flat badger pelts will still be cheap, but they will be less picky than years past on badgers. If it has some fur on it, skin it with the feet on! The Bobcat market hasn't been really set

yet, but we will have all of the big bobcat buyers. Also, if you have pretty backed bobcats, leave the feet on them for the wall hanger trade. Badger, otter, bobcat skull prices are very good along with all skull prices so bring them frozen.

On Jan 24th and 25th I traveled to Boise to attend the IDFG commission meeting. It was season setting time for furbearers. We didn't get everything we wanted but we were successful on getting some beaver closures lifted, clearwater otter quota raised and opening the water trapping season earlier in 6 of the 7 regions. Please communicate with us if there are any season or rule changes you would like us to look into changing. We are trying to lift Idaho's trapping reciprocity laws for nonresidents in the legislature. We have been discussing this for years and are finally going to make that happen and not discriminate against our fellow trappers in California and New Mexico.

Hope to see you all at the March 8-10 fur sale in Glenns Ferry or at our banquet on April 6th in Filer. 2024 sustaining memberships are now available with the new 2024 beaver patch. You can purchase those on the website or mail to our PO Box 256 Fairfield, Idaho 83327 address. Sustaining memberships are \$25 and receive a limited-edition patch and a listing in our magazine.

Thank you
Rusty Kramer
Idaho Trappers Association President
208-870-3217
208-870-3217

MONTANA FUR HARVESTERS 2024 Raffle Rifle!

This year we thought we would buy two rifles, an AR-15 and a scoped hunting rifle and let the winner choose the one they want. Both rifles are in place and look great. Raffle tickets are \$10 each and we had 700 printed this year.

Tom Fieber 🦌

Lesson learned this trapping

season! Even at my ripe old age, loss of hearing, sight, memory, and everything else, it's still pays keeping an open mind. Over the past few years, we have been using

trail cameras after they were made legal. Some were stolen, set in poor locations, taking thousands of pictures of a branch blowing in the wind, photos of trap thieves driving by, dead batteries, snow covering the lens the day the wolves showed up, the list goes on.

On the other hand, I have some great photos of almost every animal in the woods. One of the things I have been hearing about is the cellular cameras used on traplines. Never paid too much attention to that because some of our lines are not in cell service. This year that changed. We were invited to set a new line on a private ranch. The manager has been using cellular cameras to monitor property lines and wildlife.

The manager informed us that he used cellular trail cameras, and he would set them up at the trap sites. We had not used that kind of system before but agreed to the suggestion. Being that the 48-hour trap check time was met, we didn't have to physically check the traps until something happened. The traps sat from January first until February tenth. He called that morning to say that we had a wolf in a trap. See page 12

It proved to be very beneficial, we didn't have to drive in every 48 hours to check so there were no tire ruts or open gates to worry about. We didn't disturb the wildlife or the ranch activities. The mandatory visual checks were met by taking a photo every other day.

I am seriously looking into buying some for next year. My problem of not having cell service on some lines might be overcome with a system that has a master camera that up to 24 cameras can relay too. If I have service with in a ¼ mile of my first camera I can reach to ranges between the cameras varying from ¼ mile to as much as 1 mile depending on cover and terrain. Sounds too good to be true but worth checking out.

Even with the high cost of getting setup, it could pay for itself in fuel savings and shorten trap check days and avoid travel on dangerous roads due to bad weather.

Tom Fieber 🦌



WE PROMOTE AND PRESERVE FUR HARVESTING AND ITS HERITAGE IN MONTANA AS BOTH A SPORT AND AN INDUSTRY THROUGH EDUCATION AND REGULATORY ACTIVISM. WE SUPPORT FUR HARVESTING AS A SUSTAINABLE USE TOOL FOR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, AND FIGHT TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE WILDLIFE AND HABITAT. WE WORK WITH MT FWP TO SUPPORT THEIR MANAGEMENT GOALS.

Activities*****

Active with FWP shaping regulations that shape our trapping.

Trapper Education

Booths at Family Forestry Expo

School Shows

Northwest Montana Expo

Newsletters

Local County Fairs

Fur Handling Clinics

Public events

✕ Montana Fur Harvesters represents Trapper, Houndsmen and Predator Hunters

✕ Consider becoming a member of The Montana Trappers Association and The National Trappers Association. Every dollar raised will help to fight for trappers across the nation. Go online to their websites to join.

Memberships run from January 1 to December 31

Please Complete this form and send to: MFH, PO Box 3481, Kalispell MT 59903

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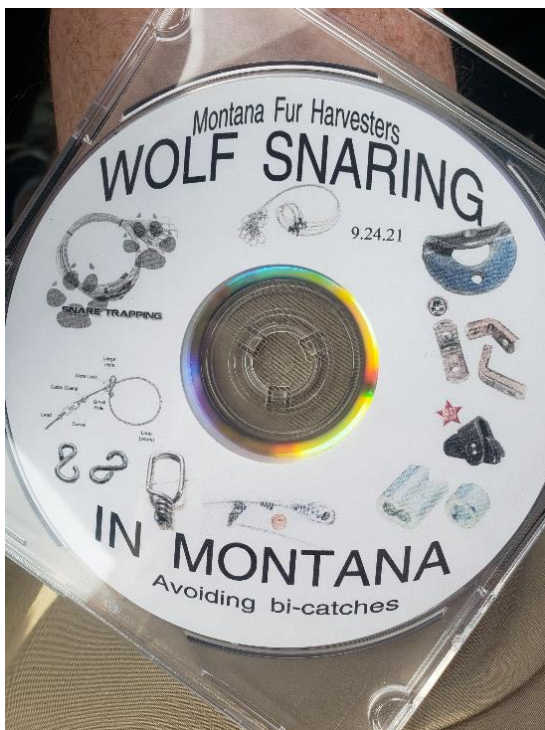
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This very popular video is a must see for anyone thinking of snaring in Montana. I have sent them out to Alaska, Idaho and Montana. If you can't make one of your local classes, at least take time to view this before you start buying or making snares. It could save you money from buying wrong supplies or worse making a bad set. **To purchase a video:** Pick one up at a local class for \$20 and save \$5 postage. Send a **check** for \$25 in the mail to, Tom Fieber, 507 Bayview Dr, Polson Mt 59860. For **Credit Card** sales at \$25. Send me your contact info then call me at 406-250-3386 Our Wolf Snaring Education Video on Avoiding By-catches has been shown to over 400 prospective wolf snaring trappers. The video has been sold in multiple states as well. Evening classes were held in a dozen local communities and in online FWP Wolf Certification Classes. The video is available to all. **Tom Fieber** 🐾

Thanks to The Meuli's of Columbia Falls.

They are always willing to share their facility for our events. Shawn, Amber, and Kimberly are great sportsmen! Great one on March 23rd, more info later.

Charter Members

Donating \$100 or more!

The following members have gone the extra mile to support MFH. Without this commitment, it would be hard to publish this and host the fur shows.

Tom Gilmore, Tom has donated more time and merchandise to trapping organizations than most. His Fur Handling Clinics in Libby are top notch.

Linda Tutvedt, Linda not only joined as a charter member but offered muskrat trapping on her property. Her generosity was really appreciated by the kids and instructors as well.

Bill Boehme, Bill has been supporting us as a charter member for years. He is a great seminar instructor and a real member of the trapping community.

Josh Jurek, Josh raised \$400 at the Palooza that he donated back to MFH. Josh is a dedicated trapper and a great artist. Josh is now MTA District 1 Director.

Dan Thingelstad, Dan has donated several wolf pelts that he donated back the proceeds and helps run booths. His work on the Fisher denning Box project was above and beyond.

Idaho Trappers Association, This Association is a real asset to the entire US Trapper Community. Thanks to Rusty Kramer for all he does.

Ed Schweitzer, Ed attended our booth at the Kalispell Gun Show and signed up as a charter member. This is deeply appreciated.

Scott H Smith, Director from Whitefish has been supporting the Fur Harvesters in many ways, manning booths as well.

Kenneth Cordoza, our past President still goes out of his way to support his organization.

Rusty Kramer, Idaho Trappers Association President has been a strong supporter here in Montana.

Mark Williams, from Florida has his second term.

Bob and Nickie Clyde of St Regis have supported wolf trapping since 2011.

Montana Fur Harvesters works closely with local FWP personnel. Game warden, **Jon Obst**, is one of the first to work with trappers and is a valued asset to the trapping community. He knows trapping, regulations, how traps function, what trappers are dealing with.

Wildlife biologist, **Jessy Coltrane**, has been heading up the fisher denning box project in the Cabinet Mountains. She has been great to work with and is a hard worker herself. Wildlife biologist for region one.

Neil Anderson, he has been another one that attends public meetings and sportsman events. He has been working to address road and trail issues as well as other issues that affect sportsman. Neil really listens to people's concerns and acts on them.

Biologist, **Tyler Parks** in Region Two is also very good to work with. Tyler runs the region 2 spring trapper meetings and is a member of the trapping education committee.

Dillon Tabish from Region 1 is always doing what he can to get things organized and get out press releases.

Nathan Kluge is our new Furbearer biologist for FWP in Helena. Nathan has been active at the Trapper Education Class and has been really good to work with and knowledgeable as a trapper.

Ben Chappelow, game warden from the Flathead, has been filling in for Jon Obst in that capacity. Ben has been assisting with the Trapper Ed Classes and doing a great Job.

These are just a few of the many local personnel that I work with and appreciate.

Thanks to each and every one of them!

ARE ALASKAN WOLVES TARGETING WOLVERINES?

January 31, 2024 by [Joshua Rapp Learn](#)

A pack near Anchorage has likely killed three wolverines in the past few years

It was a clear, sunny spring day in April, 2023 at Chugach State Park just east of Anchorage, Alaska, but the weather was still below freezing as Kiana Young searched for blood.

Young, a wildlife biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) furbearer program, and her colleagues received an alert 11 days earlier that a wolverine fitted with a GPS collar had stopped moving in the mountainous forest terrain, suggesting it had died. But weather conditions were too cloudy and a helicopter wasn't available to fly researchers in to check on why the adult female died, until now.

After spotting the wolverine's den from a helicopter, the scientists hiked the steep, mixed forest to a creek, where they found the GPS collar and a moose (*Alces alces*) carcass. Traveling about 200-300 meters up from the den, they detected some blood. Then, they found the carcass of the female wolverine (*Gulo gulo*).

As Young and her colleagues detailed in a [study](#) published recently in *Ecology and Evolution*, the carcass was still mostly intact—there were really only signs of a few bites. “It had been picked over by birds and small animals,” Young said.

But without much to go on forensically, the team still had a good idea of what had happened to the wolverine. The ADFG and biologists from U.S. Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson had also been tracking the movement of a wolf (*Canis lupus*) pack in the area for more than two years. Some of the individuals in the pack wore tracking collars, and their location data revealed a cluster of activity around the same area at about the time the wolverine's movement stopped.

All of this may be chalked up to coincidence—wolves are known to scavenge carcasses, after all.

But this would have been the third case of wolf-on-wolverine violence in this area involving this pack, and the wolves didn't appear to have eaten the carcass. These interactions are teaching wildlife managers more about the ways that top predators interact.

Killing pattern

The first incident occurred in March of 2022. Wildlife managers with ADFG were capturing wolves as part of their monitoring work when they happened upon a pack standing over the freshly killed carcass of an adult female wolverine.

The second case came in January, 2023. The researchers had been monitoring a juvenile male wolverine, when they received the signal that the animal had stopped moving. Weather conditions were bad, so a field crew couldn't get there right away. An initial attempt to check out what happened was interrupted by another battle between predators—the wolf pack was chasing off a family group of four brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) near the wolverine carcass, and the crew called off the effort due to safety concerns.

“When we finally got the carcass, we saw it had puncture wounds that could be attributed to it being killed by wolves,” Young said.

Like the wolverine Young detected in April, 2023, the other two had also died around the time that tracking collar information placed the same wolf pack in their close vicinity. It could be coincidence, but necropsy reports and other evidence showed this was highly unlikely. Rather, it looked as though this pack was killing wolverines in the Chugach State Park area.

Further necropsies on the third wolverine killed revealed that its skull had been smashed in. The researchers hadn't noticed that at first, since the skin on its head wasn't broken. Young speculated that the wolves may have inflicted this trauma by swinging the wolverine into a rock or tree. “When they kill something, they tend to play around and move it,” she said.

Collateral damage

Young can't be sure of what happened in the third case, but the presence of the moose carcass and the nearby wolverine den can provide some clues. Though the researchers didn't examine the moose carcass in any detail, it's possible that the wolf pack killed the moose. Since the wolverine den was nearby, the female might have also come out to feed on the moose carcass and encountered the wolves there. Or it could be that the wolverine was traveling to or from its den when it encountered the wolves feeding on the moose carcass.

What's also curious is that the wolves don't seem to have fed on any of the three wolverine carcasses. Puncture marks on the wolverines' hides and necks match pretty well with wolf jaws, but the first two carcasses weren't consumed, and the evidence mostly suggests smaller scavengers fed on the third carcasses after happening upon it later.

Why the wolves attacked the wolverines is another big question. "Our guess is it's a combination [of factors], the main thing being territoriality," Young said, adding that wolf packs typically defend food resources or dens from other wolf packs as well as other predators like bears or coyotes (*Canis latrans*). In the second dead wolverine case, where wildlife managers witnessed a scuffle between bears and the wolf pack, they later confirmed the presence of a nearby wolf den.

In the areas of these incidences, there may be limited resources to feed a large pack of wolves. They may see a wolverine as competition. "Wolverines are quite a bit smaller, but they have a very similar habitat niche and a very similar diet niche," Young said. "They live in a lot of the same places and eat a lot of the same things."

As far as the apparent outcome of the encounters, Young said that while wolverines are "feisty," they may not be able to handle a pack of wolves.

The fact that this has occurred three times in a relatively short time period suggests that these interactions are probably happening elsewhere, but just haven't been observed that often due to the low density of wolves and wolverines on landscapes, Young said.

"Especially with these species, they are hard to study on their own," she said. "When you look at the interactions between them, it gets even harder."

But knowing that these interactions occur, researchers can begin to ask questions like whether climate change will affect these disputes over resources or territory.



PORTLAND, Ore., — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is announcing its final rule to list the distinct population segment of the North American wolverine in the contiguous U.S. as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The Service is also issuing an interim rule under ESA section 4(d) tailored to the wolverine's conservation needs that exempts take related to research activities, take incidental to lawful trapping for other species, and take resulting from forest management activities associated with wildfire risk reduction in the contiguous U.S. "Current and increasing impacts of climate change and associated habitat degradation and fragmentation are imperiling the North American wolverine," said Pacific Regional Director Hugh Morrison. "Based on the best available science, this listing determination will help to stem the long-term impact and enhance the viability of wolverines in the contiguous United States."

"As I think about how some want to push their emotions out to all, are they looking at the entire picture? We have seen this play out with woodland caribou that have been exterminated in Idaho. Bighorn sheep, mt goats and other ungulates that are being eliminated by predation. We don't want to see one species overpopulated at the expense of others. " Tom

AMERICAN MINK IN MONTANA

General Description

This medium-sized, semi-aquatic carnivore has a long, thin body; short, sturdy legs; short, pointed nose; short, rounded ears, and a dorsoventrally flattened head. Thickly furred tail. Usually rich dark brown in color with a white chin patch. Sometimes white spots on belly. Fur is soft and lustrous with long, glossy guard hairs. Dense pelage is its only obvious aquatic adaptation. Total length: 19 to 28 inches. Weight: 1.5 to two pounds. A medium-sized mammal with an elongate body, a long tail, small rounded ears, and relatively short legs; pelage is soft, luxurious, and generally rich brown to almost black dorsally; the underparts are paler, sometimes with a whitish chin patch and whitish spotting elsewhere; five digits on each foot; head to body 330 to 430 mm in males, 300 to 400 mm in females; tail 158 to 230 mm in males, 128 to 200 mm in females; mass 681 to 2310 g in males, 790 to 1089 g in females; basilar length of skull 58 to 69 mm (Burt and Grossenheider 1964, Hall 1981, and Nowak 1991).

Differs from weasels in having brown rather than white or yellowish underparts. Differs from Marten in having a white chin patch (Marten has pale buff patch on

throat and breast), generally darker pelage (Marten's pelage generally is yellowish brown except on the feet and end of the tail), and 4 rather than 5 upper postcanine teeth. Differs from the Fisher in having 4



rather than 5 upper postcanine teeth, a white chin patch, and smaller size. River Otter is much larger (up to 130 cm total length and 11 kg).


Migration

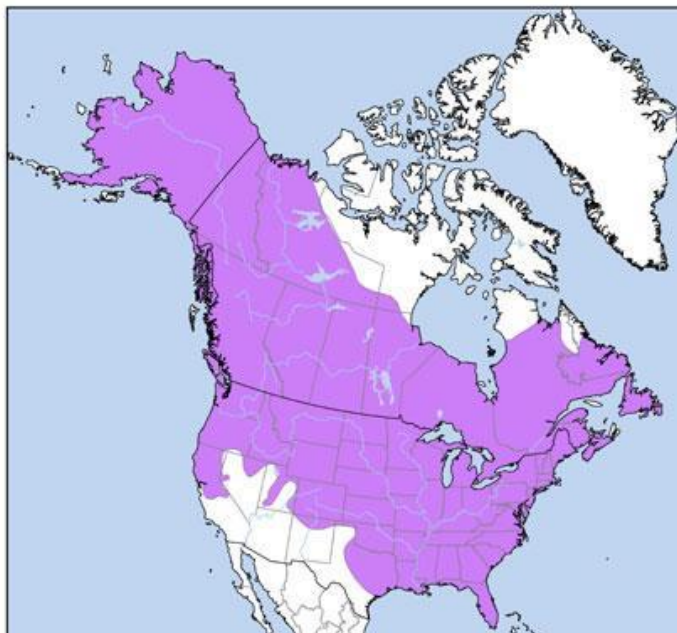
Non-migratory. Males make extensive movements and juveniles disperse.

Habitat

Usually found along streams and lakes. Commonly occurs in marshes and beaver ponds. Permanence of water and dependable source of food are most important habitat components. Often uses den sites of other animals and is commonly found in association with Muskrats. Semi-aquatic forager. Can kill prey larger than itself. Chiefly nocturnal, territorial, and secretive. Dens underneath piles of brush or driftwood, under rocks, in hollow logs, and in houses or dens abandoned by Beavers or Muskrats. Very aggressive mating behavior. Wetland habitats - riverine, palustrine, lacustrine.

Western Hemisphere Range

We find mink across Montana, unlike martin that are forest dwellers, mink prefer the aquatic habitat. Fur value on the market is quite low presently. In 2014 pelts sold for around \$20, now that is averaging \$3 to \$5. With the low prices, not many trappers are targeting them now but do pick up some in muskrat sets. 



Working with Montana FWP.

This trapping season we tried a different approach. Why aren't trappers working with FWP collaring them? In our wolf trapping lines we think we are targeting around six different packs. Working with our local wolf biologist for region 2, Tyler Parks, we learned that he had no collared wolves along the Idaho border. From Lookout pass to Lolo pass and south of interstate 90, none. This area contains a very large population of wolves that has impacted the ungulate herds. From my experience, I see that each pack has a core area, but the fringes do overlap with other packs. To better understand the dynamics, I have paid attention to reports from FWP on wolf packs, past data from collared wolves has helped to estimate how the packs utilize their territories.

Over the past year I have approached wildlife biologists in region 1 and region 2 about collaring wolves in that area. Presently each wolf that we harvest allows us to be reimbursed up to \$1500 for expenses plus the pelts are worth another \$500 to \$700. That brings up value to around \$2000. These funds seldom cover our costs to harvest them.

The Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board averages \$9,000 per wolf removed. A few years back, the MT Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife donated \$15,000 to the USDA Wildlife Services for wolf and coyote control in Montana. They were happy to report 3 wolves were removed. I was not able to locate data on Montana's average cost per wolf removed but assume it's similar.

My suggestion was to offer them a chance to collar trapped wolves from willing trappers. I was assured that they did not have any way to reimburse us at this time. There is also a deep divide within the trapping community to do such a thing. Most people that are targeting wolves are doing so to reduce numbers and are not sure that putting them back is in their best interest.

This fall I was introduced to a land manager that was concerned about wolves taking elk on their property. That place was right on the territorial edge of one of the packs that we have targeted over the years. One of the first days that we were able to scout the property, we came across a herd of 71 elk. Elk and deer tracks were everywhere. I expressed my concern that we would have a hard time avoiding them in traps. The manager said that he had trail camera pictures and videos of wolves and showed us where they were taken. After a few scouting trips prior to trapping season, we did locate a couple of sites to set. We pre baited one area then came back as season allowed



Wildlife biologist, Tyler Parks from Region 2 getting ready to collar this drugged wolf.

and set up a few footholds. With the number of deer and elk, we avoided any snares and used the smaller foothold traps to avoid holding them.

The manager informed us that he used cellular trail cameras, and he would set them up at the trap sites. We had not used that kind of system before but agreed to the suggestion. Being that the 48-hour trap check time was met, we didn't have to physically check the traps until something happened. The traps sat from January first until February tenth. That morning got a call from the Manager saying that we had a wolf in a trap. It was our off day, so I had to make the 2-hour trip to get there. I said that it would be best not to approach the site until I, the licensed trapper, would need to be there to dispatch it. Before I headed over, I called Tyler about possibly collaring it. He was willing but I said that would need to clear it with the manager first. When we got there, the manager, his wife and two of the ranch employees met us at the entrance. They were excited about the opportunity to deal with the wolf. We explained that to dispatch the wolf we need to

use a firearm, his wife had a sad look on her face. I brought up that we did have another alternative, having it collared instead. My trapping partner was sure I was losing my mind, but the others were excited about the prospect. They all agreed to that, so I called Tyler, and he brought his wife, Molly Parks, to help assist him. Molly is our Wildlife Technician from Headquarters in Helena.

It was a two-hour trip for them also, so we had to wait at the ranch for them. Meanwhile, every once in a while, the cell phone would notify us that the wolf was active again, so we could watch it on the phone. Most of the time it was just laying down.



The collar is attached and adjusted. She is ready to go.

Once Tyler and Molly arrived and were ready, we walked a couple of hundred yards to the trap site. Since there were eight of us, Tyler suggested that just he would slowly approach and shoot the tranquilizer by himself as we stayed out of sight. After the wolf laid down, the rest of us came within sight of the wolf and waited for the shot to take effect. As the group was walking toward the wolf, it jumped up and made a lunge and the foot slipped out of the trap, away it ran.

Luckily, it had snowed a bit that night, so we were able to follow its tracks to where the drug had finally

subdued it. The whole group watched closely as the collar was attached, samples were taken and recorded. Turned out it was a female that was a good candidate for a collar. When the drug started to wear off, we were asked to head back out of sight. I doubt the wolf ever saw us.

The whole group was really impressed with the Parks' professionalism and work. A lot of friends were made that day. I am proud of landowners/ managers who take such a dedication to the land and the wildlife that inhabit it. On the drive home that afternoon, even my partner was pleased with how it unfolded.

About a week later the biologist called to say that the collar was working, and the wolf had moved to the east but not very far. I assumed that it had caught up with the rest of the pack of seven. Unfortunately, the next report was that only ten days after being collared, it was killed by a wolf hunter that had called it and another one in. The hunter thought there were 7 in that pack that day, so I assume it was the same pack. It didn't last long enough to gather much information, but I feel that it did indicate that it was a separate pack from the other pack from the west.

Would I do it again, only if I had the chance. The more data we have the better we can defend managing them. Perhaps Montana FWP will someday offer a financial incentive to trappers just like they have with lion studies. Would that be similar to collaring wolves, I can't say.

Tom Fieber 🐾

How was the wolf harvest this year.

Due to the short wolf season, I was expecting a lower harvest than in the past. We did have a harder time this season on our lines, but others made up for us. Back in 2019 the harvest was 293. In 2021 the record harvest was 329. In 22 it was 273. In 23 it was 258. This year it finished at 286.

I haven't seen the breakdown between hunters and trappers. I have heard about hunters taking more wolves lately than in the past. Perhaps the lack of deep snow in the mountains allowed hunters more access to more country and easier hiking. This season hunters were able to follow fresh wolf tracks to close the distance then stalk or call them in. It is good to see that sportsmen are able to continue these harvest levels. The goal is to balance the predator and ungulate populations.

Adventures in Brain Tanning

Kim Davie

I grew up on a farm and we raised goats and sheep to feed my family. One day after butchering, I felt it was a shame to let the hides go to waste and thought I would try to self-tanning... with NO idea what I was doing. First, I let the hides dry. They became hard as a rock with globs of smelly, sticky fat. I soaked them in water to soften them up and the resulting rotten mess was thrown away.

<gross>

I've always wondered how you might tan a hide at home, so my ears perked up when Ron Nail spoke at last year's Fur Handling clinic. He is keeping up the tradition of tanning hides using the techniques of Native Americans. At that clinic I skinned a fox for the first time (with the help of experts) and took the hide and skull home to try self-tanning.

There are enough brains in an animal to tan their hide (according to directions) so I took the brains out of the skull and froze them. Mr. Fox got a nice shampoo, and I combed out several burs. Next, I put the hide on a stretcher with fur facing out and used a low temp hair dryer to help it dry. I left it overnight and made sure the fur was dry, then turned it inside out, placed in on the stretcher and pinned the tail open to dry... for weeks... and weeks.

While the hide dried, I did a little research and watched Ron Nail's online video "How to Brain a Hide." Instantly, I was dreaming of all of the things I might make with my fur. I wasn't sure when I was going to get around to doing the brain part of the procedure, so once the hide was dry, I took it off the stretcher and treated it with salt. The salt helps remove any fat and can make the hide softer. Salt is not in the instructions handed down from Native Americans, but I thought this step might help soak up some of the fat and preserve the hide until I could get to it.

Summer, Fall and Winter went by so fast, and I found myself bringing the dried fox hide and container of brains to the Fur Clinic THIS year! Ron Nail was in attendance once again and coached me on what to do next. The hide had a layer of dried membrane that made it shiny, and Ron cautioned that all of that had to come off or the brain mixture wouldn't do its job. I used several pieces of sandpaper to scrub away the membrane. The fox hide is so thin that it broke through in a few places where the hide

was already very thin. Finally, I used a brush to paint the brain on the hide and it started working right away and making the stiff hide soft. I worked at the fibers – pulling them apart and rolling them over a piece of wood. I took the hide home and let it dry overnight.

If you don't have enough brains, you can usually order pork brain from a grocery store or market. I actually had enough of the brain mixture to give the hide another coat and worked it into places that were still a bit stiff. I didn't know how much pressure I could put on the hide, and I ripped it in one place during the process, but it is easily fixable. The final touch will be to smoke the hide which will add color and texture. I learned a lot and I would be willing to try it again, now that I know more about the process. The bonus to this process is that the hide isn't made with toxic chemicals, so I could eat it in an emergency... but I probably won't. ☺

Kim Davie 🦊



Kim Davie and Cory Richwine at the March Fur Clinic in Columbia Falls

Snowmobiles for the trapper's lines.

In the world of trapping, efficiency and reliability are key. That's where the Polaris 550 Voyageur snowmobile comes in, offering a blend of performance and practicality that can significantly benefit trappers in snowy terrains.

The 550 Voyageur, known for its robust construction, features a powerful engine - the Liberty 550 Fan Cooled - which provides the necessary torque and power to navigate through thick snow and challenging landscapes. This is particularly useful for trappers who need to cover large areas or access remote locations where their traps are set.

Furthermore, the design of this snowmobile provides rear storage space and a sled-trailer hookup, which is crucial for carrying traps, tools, and other necessary equipment. The ability to transport everything in one trip saves time and energy, allowing trappers to focus more on their actual trapping tasks.

An important aspect of snowmobiles like the 550 Voyageur is their maneuverability. The ability to easily navigate through dense forests or over frozen lakes makes setting and checking traps more efficient. This agility is complemented by the 155" long tracks and high flotation skis, which are essential for moving over deep snow without getting stuck.

Another key factor is the reliability of the machine. In the trapping world, where being stranded could mean being miles away from help, a



dependable snowmobile is non-negotiable. Models like the Polaris 550 Voyageur are generally known for their durability and low maintenance requirements, ensuring that trappers can rely on their machine day in and day out.

In conclusion, for trappers looking for an effective way to navigate the winter landscape, the Polaris 550 Voyageur snowmobile offers a compelling combination of power, capacity, maneuverability, and reliability. It's not just a means of transportation; it's a vital tool that can make the challenging job of trapping in snowy conditions significantly easier and more productive.

Montana Power Products, located in three locations in Ronan, Hamilton, and Libby carry these 550 voyageur as well as other models with the Liberty 550 engine. Feel free to reach out to our sales team.

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Montana Power Products not only sells great products, but they have a full-service shop to repair and maintain your equipment. They are also great supporters of the sportsman community. Like ours, Montana Sportsman for Fish & Wildlife and the Foundation For Wildlife Management. Thanks, from all of us.

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